

EMMETT JOHNSTON

MARINE ECOLOGIST, INCH ISLAND, INISHOWEN, DONEGAL

STAND



THE STORY

Meet Emmett Johnson, the man who made me want to change tack and become a marine ecologist within the space of our 45-minute interview. Emmett works to protect the home of Ireland's marine life and raise awareness of the country's basking sharks.

Starting out as a conservation volunteer, a transformational encounter with 70 basking sharks 20 years ago was the trigger for what followed.

"I was gobsmacked. It's like having an encounter with dinosaurs, except it's right near where you live."

Emmett co-founded The Irish Basking Shark Group in 2009 – an organisation that advocates for policies to protect basking sharks and other marine life.

Basking sharks are the biggest fish in the North Atlantic sea and are listed as an endangered species due to overfishing. But Ireland offers them a paradise to bask in.

"Ireland is home to thousands of basking sharks and a large portion of the global population. We have a huge responsibility to protect them."

Last October, Emmett and his team celebrated a huge win when Ireland passed a policy to protect the iconic species in Irish waters – a significant victory for basking sharks and the country's marine conservation in general. A big part of what Emmett does is connecting the local community with the majesty of the ocean.

"The sea is a special place where everyone can connect with the natural world. Yes,

you need to take care and be aware, but have fun and explore."

THE WHY

"I'm passionate about protecting and conserving the natural world and I'm a firm believer that taking direct action and contributing personally to resolving issues is good for the soul."

THE HOPE

"The revolving cycle and continuity of life on Earth gives me hope. I try to live my life as I want the world to be, and I hope that my small contribution will influence the greater scheme of things."

THE RECOMMENDATION

BOOK – *Gaia, A New Look at Life on Earth* by James Lovelock.

BOOK – *The Phenomenon of Man* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

THE CHALLENGE

"It might sound simple, but I recommend that everyone simply walks more. If you can walk rather than drive, then go by foot. Walking is the easiest way to personally experience the natural world that surrounds us. It makes us feel part of nature, because we don't just sit and observe from behind a glass barrier. Rather, we see, hear, smell and taste life occurring around us. I want to take an active part in life on our planet rather than just chatting about it or looking at it on a screen."

To find out more visit www.baskingshark.ie or follow them on Facebook @IrishBaskingSharkProject

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The Irish are island people and I am passionate about connecting us back to the sea.

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CHANGE
PRODUCTION

Photo by Jacqui Devenney Reed

